

COMIC SHOP NEWS



Some major comic book stories have ended with the death of a hero—but the upcoming Avengers storyline that kicks off in July begins with a major character's death! **Avengers: The Crossing**, the "Alpha" book for the Avengers' August relaunch. The death of one of the Avengers' team members is the catalyst for the events that will run through the Avengers titles; in conjunction with this storyline, several Marvel titles will undergo radical revampings, including Mark Waid and Ron Garney's reworking of **Captain America**, Bob Harras and Mike Deodato's revitalization of **The Avengers**, and Warren Ellis and Mike Deodato's dramatic reinterpretation of **Thor**.

The Avengers: Crossing, a 48-page no-ads deluxe format comic highlighted by a chromium cover, sets the Avengers' hunt for the killer in motion. This \$4.95 comic, written by Bob Harras and illustrated by Mike Deodato, is scheduled for July 27th release. "When all is said and done, the Avengers will never be the same again," assistant editor Matt Idelson said. And those changes are going to affect several Avengers' monthly titles as well.

Captain America's long struggle to regain his former glory reaches its end in July with the release of **Captain America #443**. When Captain America learns that he may only have

Crossing Guards

twenty-four hours to live, he refuses to wallow in self-pity; instead, he spends what may be his last day hunting down Crossbones. This issue, slated for July 11th release, leads into next month's major revamp of **Captain America**, complete with new writer Mark Waid and new artist Ron Garney (and possibly a new Captain America?...).

Thunderstrike's series comes to an end in July in a two-issue final confrontation with Bloodaxe. The situation becomes more complicated, though, when Thunderstrike is possessed by the Bloodaxe weapon, forcing Thor to step in to stop him. **Thunderstrike #23** is scheduled for July 13th release; **Thunderstrike #24** follows on July 27th; both issues are written by Tom DeFalco and illustrated by Ron Frenz and Al Milgrom.

Big changes are in store for Thor as well. Major changes are in store for the Thunder God, including the new creative team of Warren Ellis and Mike Deodato, a major revamping of Thor's costume, and a new direction for the series. In **Thor #489**, a July 6th release, Roy Thomas, MC Wyman, and Mike DeCarlo wrap up their Thor sto-

rylines, including the fate of the Godpack, the end of the Kurse Saga, and the breakup of Thor and Sif. In **Thor #490**, a July 27th release, Tom DeFalco presents the aftermath of the Thor-Thunderstrike battle in **Thunderstrike #24**. A month later, Thor undergoes one of the boldest revamps in his thirty-three year career.

In **War Machine #18**, Rhodey makes the disquieting discovery that his armor is actually alive. As Dan Abnett, Fred Haynes, and Johnny Greene reveal the origin, potential, and dangers of War Machine's morph-suit, they pave the way for significant storylines in the next few months.

And in the Avengers' sister title, **Force Works**, the creative team of Dan Abnett, Andy Lanning, Dave Ross, and Rey Garcia present the origin of the enigmatic Century. The origin begins in **Force Works #15**, leading into August's flip-book trilogy that reveals who Century is and what he plans to accomplish here on Earth; this issue is slated for July 13th release.

The Avengers' summer is so big that it can't be contained in a single company's books—which is why Malibu is also involved in

making this the biggest Avengers summer in history. The groundwork for this storyline has already begun, with the Infinity Gems passing into the Ultraverse—along with Loki, Thor's nemesis, who has called the Ultraverse home since the end of Godwheel. Loki's quest for control of those immeasurably powerful stones takes him on a circuitous path through the Ultraverse. In June's **Mantra #22**, written by Mike W. Barr and illustrated by Dave Roberts, the god of mischief crosses paths with Mantra in a quest for the Mind Gem—but he's quite surprised to discover that his minion, Primevil, finds himself more than a little attracted to the hero-turned-heroine. In July, Steve Englehart, Dean Zachary, and Bruce McCorkindale present Loki's confrontation with Night Man over the Reality Gem in **Night Man #22**.

All of this leads into the biggest Marvelverse/Ultraverse crossover of all as two superteams face off, with control of the Infinity Gems—and the fate of two universes—hanging in the balance. **UltraForce/Avengers Prelude #1**, a \$2.50 comic by Warren Ellis, Hank

Kanalz, John Royle, and John Statema, sets in motion a grand battle that leads into August's major intercompany crossover. In this 32-page prequel, Sersi is back with the Infinity Gems—but you can rest assured that the war for those powerful artifacts is far from over! **UltraForce**, the Avengers, Loki, Adam Warlock—they're all here in this story that's so cosmic that it can't be contained in a single universe! **UltraForce/Avengers Prelude #1** is slated for mid-July release.

Major heroes. Major creative teams. Major changes. No doubt about it—this is the sort of combination that no one who's ever enjoyed an issue of **The Avengers** will want to miss!

by WAYNE LEE

Byrne Sizzles On Wonder Woman

She's been around for more than fifty years, but in recent memory she's been relegated to second-string status in the DC pantheon. Now she's on her way to fan-favorite status, and to ensure her place at the top of the DC super-pantheon, she's soon to be united with one of the most versatile writer-artists in the comic book field—and artist whose back-to-the-basics style of storytelling has previously been brought to play on the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, and Superman.

In the aftermath of the events in **Wonder Woman #100**, Diana's role as the one and

only Wonder Woman is restored. Of course, her stint out of uniform wasn't all bad for her; the "Contest" and "Artemis" storylines by William Messner-Loebs and Mike Deodato, Jr., were largely responsible for making **Wonder Woman** a hot title again after being relegated to the lower levels of DC's sales lists for far too long. In their final issue, Messner-Loebs and Deodato brought an end to Artemis' tenure as Wonder Woman and restored Diana to the role she has filled for more than a half-century.

When Byrne takes over with **Wonder**

Woman #101, he introduces readers to a very different Wonder Woman. Themyscira, the Amazonian island, is nowhere to be seen; instead, Wonder Woman has made her new home in Gateway City, where she admirably fills the city's need for a superpowered protector. In discussing the changes, John Byrne says, "I expect the biggest difference between 'my' Wonder Woman and all that has gone before will be the use of lame villains, breaking the fourth wall and painting her green...."

"No, wait a minute...."

"The biggest difference will lie mainly in the fact that I am treating **Wonder Woman** as a straight superhero book, with all the punching, hitting, breaking of large objects and cosmic storylines that implies. The connection to Paradise Island is pretty much cut in my first arc—'Second Genesis,' a title fraught with multiple meaning—as is the Olympian connection (with one major exception). Mostly, what Kupperberg and I want to do is restore Diana to her proper position as the second most powerful hero in the DC Universe."

Fans have rarely seen Wonder Woman as powerful as in Byrne's interpretation of the heroine—and

to make it clear that she is indeed a big-league superstar ready to confront big-league supervillains, Byrne pits her against Darkseid in his first story arc. While this makes it clear to readers that her exploits are firmly set in the DC Universe, Byrne has no plans to integrally link her adventures to those of other DC heroes. "Since she is in the JLA as it is, I don't see how she could tie in any more closely," Byrne said. "I hope to use guest stars and the like as a cheap sales ploy, but for the most part she will exist in her own little corner, just as do Superman or Batman."

That doesn't mean that there won't be any DC heroes dropping in for a Gateway City visit, though. Future issues will feature quite a range of DC Universe guest stars, both heroes and villains. Darkseid, the already-mentioned villain of the first arc, is followed by Morgaine le Fey, which leads to guest appearances by the Phantom Stranger and Kirby's Demon Beyond that, I have plans for a JSA appearance, and, as soon as they will let me, Superman. And, too, there is a major storyline cooking (a la "Death of Superman" and "Knightfall") which will almost certainly feature at least walk-ons by most of the DC Universe."

"I'm very excited to be able to work on Wonder Woman every month," Byrne said. "She's the last of the 'big-name toys' I've got to play with." Unlike some of the other "big name toys" that Byrne has reinterpreted, however, Wonder Woman wasn't one of Byrne's comic book favorites from his youth. "I did not buy **Wonder Woman** when I was a kid," Byrne said. "It was a 'girl's book,' after all, though I frequently looked at it in the store to follow the Ross Andru artwork... I was thrilled when Andru did **Metal Men**, since I liked his stuff so much — although, since there were no credits in those days, he was 'the guy who does **Wonder Woman**,' not Ross Andru." Instead, Byrne discovered the character "from her appearances in the **Justice League of America** and the Seventies TV series. And, of course, I read George's first year or so."

Byrne supplies the cover art for **Wonder Woman #101**, but Brian Bolland fans take heart; the very popular Wonder Woman cover artist is slated to return with **Wonder Woman #102**.

Wonder Woman #101, a \$1.95 comic in DC's Miraweb format, which features glossy paper and upscale coloring, is scheduled for July 13th release.

by CLIFF BIGGERS



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From Your Friendly Neighborhood Comics Outlet

Ready Freddy

Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel are about to get some superheroeic company! Freddy Freeman's life is on the line in a two-part story that begins in **Power of Shazam! #6**, when Freddy suffers a crippling accident. It seems like recovery is impossible—but Captain Marvel and Mary suspect that the power of Shazam might be strong enough to save the lad. It all comes together in **Power of Shazam! #7**, when the power of Shazam changes Freddy's life forever. Jerry Ordway is the mastermind behind the story; he's joined by artists Peter Krause and Mike Manley. Spotting this one on the stands should be easy; just keep an eye open for the stunning painted cover by Shazam-meister Jerry Ordway. **Power of Shazam! #7**, a \$1.75 comic, is scheduled for July 20th release.



Big changes in store for Spider-Man: not only is John Romita Jr. coming on board as artist on **Spider-Man** later this fall, but Marvel has signed major writer/artist Dan Jurgens (whose work on **Superman** has been integral in the hero's revamp) to launch a replacement title for **Web of Spider-Man**,

CSNsider

which will come to an end to make room for Jurgens' new series... **Manhunter**, the Steven Grant-Vince Giarrano series from DC Comics, is coming to a dramatic conclusion in its twelfth issue, slated for early fall release... The **Batman/Spider-Man Crossover** book by J.M. DeMatteis, Mark Bagley, and Mark Farmer is now slated for fall release... You can expect to see far fewer bootleg Japanese videos at convention tables in the future, now that the Japanese Animation Industry has formed JAILED (Japanese Animation Industry Legal Enforcement Division), a group dedicated to tracking down the manufacturers, distributors, and sellers of bootleg tapes... Wizards of the Coast is planning a national **Vampire Day** on June 24th, to celebrate the early July release of **Vampire: The Eternal Struggle**, WotC's revamped **Jyhad** game; stores across the country will be able to take part in the event, and a lucky fan will win a trip for two to Seattle (home of Wizards of the Coast), along with a very special prize... Can it be true? Is there really a **Little Oz Squad** in the works, thanks to the maniacal creativity of Ahlquist and Sagara? Believe it or else!... Comico has announced their own collectible card game, **Chrysalis: Borne of the Supernature**; copies of **Elementals #1** will feature one of five different rare variant cards, while copies of **Oblivion #3** will feature one of two rare variant cards, offering comics fans the opportunity to compile a set of seven variants not available in the card packs... Warner Bros had created a **Batman Forever** site on the World Wide Web in conjunction with the upcoming release of the third Batman film; you can drop in for a visit at <http://batmanforever.com> any time now... By now, you certainly have heard that **Lois and Clark: The New Adventures of Superman** has been renewed for a third season; guess that means we get to find out in September how Lois responds to Clark's marriage proposal... Joe Quesada and Jimmy Palmiotti are supplying the art for nine interconnecting covers for various Extreme Studios releases this summer, including **Bloodstrike**, **Brigade**, **Chapel**, **Glory**, **Knightmare**, **Newmen**, **Prophet**, **Supreme** and **Youngblood**... Todd Johnson and Larry Stroman, formerly associated with Axis Comics, have signed on to produce a new **The Mark** series for Dark Horse... Joe Kubert is producing—and Dark Horse will be publishing—a new 1996-release non-fiction work, **Far From Sarajevo**, based on his correspondence with a friend, Ervin Rustemagic, who experienced the war first hand; "Trapped with his family in the Bosnian war zone, his only communication to the outside world was through his fax," Kubert said. "His messages described the horrors and frustrations visited on the defenseless people of Sarajevo..." Early '96 brings another Marvel/DC crossover: the long-awaited meeting of Batman and Daredevil, written by Dan Chichester and illustrated by Lee Weeks; look for more info in the near future... Tom Lyle is involved in Marvel's fall revamp-and-relaunch of the Punisher... Horizon Hobbies has a Bat-fan must-have series in the works: **Batman Vehicles Through The Ages**, a model series launching late this year, will feature various Batman vehicles from the 1940's to the present, beginning with that lovely 1950 Batmobile that first appeared in **Detective Comics #156**... Turnabout is fair play: Jim Lee is supplying a pinup in **Ash #4**, while Joe Quesada is returning the favor and supplying a pinup for **WildCATs #21**; each will illustrate the other's characters...

Bin There, Done That

How did the security-conscious Scrooge McDuck come to build his enormous, high-security Money Bin? That hitherto-unanswered question is the subject of Don Rosa's story in **Uncle Scrooge #294**, the tenth installment of the twelve-part "Life and Times of Scrooge McDuck." It turns out that constructing such a massive undertaking wasn't as easy as one might have suspected... particularly when the US Army, the Navy, the Marines, President Theodore Roosevelt, and the Junior Woodchucks all stand in the way! Find out how Scrooge overcomes such weighty obstacles in **Uncle Scrooge #294**, a July 26th release from Gladstone comics.

Masked Heroes

Their mask and distinctive "costume" may make them instantly recognizable, but they aren't superheroes. They're raccoons—or more specifically, they're Cathy Hill's **Mad Raccoons**, and they were the stars of their own charming series from MU Press. Later this summer, they'll be returning to the comic shops in a trade paperback that collects all four issues of the original **Mad Raccoons** series, along with some additional material from earlier appearances in **The Dreamery**. This offbeat, witty, charming series features the same sort of well-crafted, carefully planned anthropomorphic world as Walt Kelly's **Pogo** or Jeff Smith's **Bone**; the humor and the polished cartooning style should be equally appealing to comic book and comic strip fans. **The Mad Raccoons Collection**, a \$14.95 trade paperback, is scheduled for July release.

Boneyard's Cast of Celebrities Featured In Collection

Jeffrey Dahmer, Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, OJ Simpson... while everybody else was poking fun at comic book characters in their satires, Boneyard Press and controversial publisher Hart D. Fisher were raising their sights and taking aim on some much higher-profile targets. Now some of those early satires, along with articles about the flood of media coverage they generated, are being collected in **Boned**, a 104-trade paperback that reprints such memorable tales as **Jeffrey Dahmer Vs. Jesus Christ**, **Rush Limbaugh Must Die**, and **OJ's Big Bust-Out**. Want to find out what attorney Robert Shapiro had to say about Boneyard Press' various OJ Simpson comics? You'll find out here! **Boned**, a \$10.95 book intended for mature readers, is scheduled for July release.

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Looking for something to read? Tired of comic book disappointments? Well, Cliff Biggers and Brett Brooks are here to help out. Each month, Cliff (in plain type) and Brett (in italic type) take a look at a few choice comic books scheduled for release in the next few weeks. Our intent here isn't to produce "killer reviews" or to skewer disappointing comics; instead, we sort through the dozens of review copies we receive each month and pick out the books that deserve some attention, helping you to make educated choices of reading material.

Publishers interested in having their books considered for review in this area should send copies to *CSN Give & Take*, 2339 Milstead Circle, Marietta GA 30066. We'd prefer receiving copies of the books at least thirty days prior to their scheduled release date.

At the end of the reviews, we also offer a one to five rating for each book, with both Brett's and Cliff's ratings listed. Since we make a point to only devote space to books that we think deserve attention, this will enable readers to determine just how much Brett and Cliff like each book. Here's the scale:

- ★ Pick it up if you need something to read; it's worth the ticket price
- ★★ Entertaining, but at times predictable
- ★★★ Good stuff, worth a close look
- ★★★★ Primo reading; don't pass it up
- ★★★★★ You don't find comics better than this; *creme de la creme*

Toyo Harada ain't gonna know what hit him.

Oh, it's not the superheroes of Acclamation who are going to turn his world upside down. It's just one guy. Keith Giffen.

For four years now, the Valiant Universe has been an intriguing place to visit. A dramatic place. A tragic place.

But for the most part, it's never been a *funny* place.

Oh, to give credit where credit is due, my absolute favorite Valiant storylines were Barry Windsor-Smith's *Archer & Armstrong* issues—and the reason why is that they managed to offer a thoroughly entertaining blend of adventure and lighthearted humor.

But Keith Giffen passed light-hearted about a hundred yoks ago. His humor is visceral, offbeat, and fairly unrelenting.

Harada may have overcome a lot of challenges, but I don't think he has anything that effectively respond to a Keith Giffen four-issue humor assault.

PunX is set on the island of Acclamation, where strange things happen far too often. UFO touchdowns... Meteor strikes... radioactive anomalies... dogmatic superheroes who can overcome the mightiest enemies but have a bit more trouble with a sheet of plate glass... Acclamation is a sort of bad-karma magnet.

And now Acclamation, a small island off the coast of Oregon, is home to one of the strangest groups of superbeings Toyo Harada is ever going to meet. This is Keith Giffen's Justice League merged with Keith Giffen's Legion of Super-Heroes, with a dash of Keith Giffen's Heckler thrown in for good measure.

If you think that action-adventure can't be funny and still be effectively exciting, then you haven't read Giffen at his prime. And that's just what *PunX* is: this is the best work Giffen has done in years. The humor isn't just comic relief thrown in between superhero battles; it's an essential part of the storyline. But what makes *PunX* work so well is that the humor never takes away from the energy of the book; the action doesn't stop so that the characters can be funny, which is the formula far too many writers use to introduce humor into superhero comics.

I think that *unrelenting* is a very good word for this book. When you read Giffen, you have to be ready for anything, but it never really seems like you are ready for it. He keeps you off-balance to the point where all you can do is sit back and enjoy the ride. The best part is that the ride is worth taking. *PunX* is indeed the best thing that Giffen has done in years. There are a lot of moments of you sitting and shaking your head in disbelief, but you're laughing the whole time. Even the serious moments of this book leave you with a smile on your face.

That's what makes Giffen's humor so different from other writers. He never clearly separates the humor and the action; he manages to meld the two so well that the action manages to be humorous and exciting at the same time.

Artistically, *PunX* is a more subdued Giffen than the Keith who pushed the visual edge with *Trencher* and his latter issues of *Lobo*, creating line art that relied on color for substance. In this book, Giffen has returned to the more mainstream action-art style that proved so successful for him in the 1980's and early 1990's.

I don't care if you've never read a Valiant title before—you're really going to hate yourself if you don't spend an issue or four hanging out with *PunX*. It may be superhero, but it still puts the funny back in funny books.

PunX 1

Cliff: ★★★★★

Brett: ★★★★★

Not everything is what you expect it to be. When I first heard that Ted McKeever was doing a Batman story, I expected something very much on the strange side; a very different look at Batman from both a visual and literary viewpoint. I thought that McKeever would create a story that didn't fit with most people's vision of the Dark Knight. Like I said, not everything is what you would expect it to be. In this case, however, it was exactly what I thought it would be.

Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight #74 begins a two-part Batman story entitled "Engines" that uses Batman as a cameo character. Ted McKeever has long been regarded for his ability to take the darker, more hidden side of humanity and bringing it to light for everyone to see. When you read one of McKeever's stories, you feel like a visitor walking through a carnival sideshow, viewing the freaks on display with a combination of disgust and fascination. McKeever's characters are like the freaks on display: you look at them and see something that might have been you, if things had worked out differently. So, with that in mind, McKeever has turned his hand towards Gotham City.

And McKeever's Gotham City is so surreal, so bleak, that it's almost as easy to believe that Batman has paid a visit to the world of Eddy Current or Metropolis.

"Engines" deals with a citizen of Gotham who sees himself as nobody. He sees himself as so much a nobody that he never even bothers to give us his name. He is a soul trapped in the world, waiting for release, but to end his own life would be wrong. Instead, this nobody turns his attention to the world of death, and how it affects everyone. From his job at a meat processing plant, to the casual killing that pervades Gotham's night life, this nobody sees life as a waste—or a joke. To him, Batman is a joke that would never bother coming to his world; Batman is a creature that only protects others.

Everything comes together for this nobody on the one night that he is witness to a crime, and the Dark Knight swoops in to capture the killer. The next day, the killer is released—because there was no evidence to convict him. Nobody was a witness. So, a nobody is going to have to do something about it.

Batman is a dark hero, but he rarely has to immerse himself in the world of death. Batman is a champion of the living, and his modus operandi is to preserve his enemies' lives so that the legal system can punish them. The protagonist of this series, though, is constantly immersed in the world of death; for him, death isn't particularly horrifying or tragic, so he operates from a different point of view of Batman, isolated from that world.

McKeever takes the theme of isolation and despair and elevates it to a poetic form in this story. There is almost no dialogue involved in "Engines," as McKeever opts for a running narration by Nobody. McKeever creates nobody to be nothing more than a gear in a machine that acts and reacts as he sees fit. The thing that makes Nobody so fascinating is that he is perfectly aware of what he is doing, and why he is doing it. There are no dark motivations to nobody, which makes the story all the more disturbing. We know that nobody has become a threat to himself and society at large, but to nobody, he is only doing what needs to be done; he is simply filling his role for now.

In his own way, he's as straightforwardly single-minded as Batman himself...

McKeever has set "Engines" up to be a story that is very atypical of the normal Batman lot. There are moments of absurd insight that kept me enthralled throughout the story. The first part of the story ends with nobody's inevitable confrontation

with the Dark Knight—

And what a monstrous, distorted Batman it is... almost as distorted as the protagonist's view of life seems to us...

—and, despite the fact that we know the final outcome before we read the second half, again we want to look. We want to see nobody, the sideshow freak go through his act. Which makes you wonder just how much of an Everyman nobody is in this story, and how much of all of us is a Nobody.

Batman: Legends of the Dark Knight 74

Cliff: ★★★★★

Brett: ★★★★★

Remember that funny Keith Giffen guy that I mentioned a couple of reviews back? Well, he also has a pretty good sensibility for grand action-adventure with an ultraviolent edge, judging from the new *SuperPatriot II* series he's doing with artist Dave Johnson.

SuperPatriot is essentially an unfunny hero. He's a destructive, almost unstoppable, quintessential hero with a patriotic slant, and he's determined to shut down a dangerous, malevolent, conspiratorial organization known as the Covenant.

What *SuperPatriot* doesn't realize as this series begins, though, is that he's created a family tradition. In fact, he's unaware that he's even created a family. But he has—and the son and daughter he's never met are determined to carry on the family tradition by combating crime in their own patriotic-hero guises of Liberty and Justice.



JUDGEMENT DAY!

DAN JURGENS • DICK GIORDANO

SOLAR

MAN OF THE ATOM

COMING THIS JUNE

ACCLAIM COMICS, INC. VALIANT

Okay, so far it sounds like a typical superhero-and-his-sidekicks routine, right? You can be sure that Keith Giffen isn't going to let this series move down that predictable road, though.

Liberty and Justice work for the Covenant. But they don't see themselves as villains, and they don't see the Covenant as villainous. Instead, they see their organization as a noble and pure one that has been given a bad name by rogues within the group. "You're judging the Catholic Church by what the I.R.A. does," Liberty adds as an analogy at one point—and she means it. She's absolutely dedicated to supporting the organization that her father hates... but she's perfectly willing to help him in his mission, because in doing so she's eliminating the rogue elements that give the Covenant a bad name.

One of the things that makes this book so much fun to read is that *Superpatriot* and kin are humorless characters. That makes them very funny at times. It is a dry and dark humor at times, but it is funny nonetheless. The action-adventure side of the story works great, but it is amplified by the touches of humor that are brought to the series.

I'm not sure that I'd categorize his children as humorless; while Liberty in particular is deathly serious, her solemnity is the same as Oliver Hardy's pomposity in so many Laurel and Hardy shorts. There is humor in excessive seriousness, and Giffen knows it.

Superpatriot II reunites Giffen with Dave Johnson, the ace illustrator of the first *Superpatriot* series. Dave's work in that first series was first-class—but he has so far outdone himself with this series that there's no comparison. Not only does Dave get a chance to illustrate the sort of ultraviolence that is an Image mainstay, but he's also getting to add some of the high-tech touches and the whimsical elements that make Dave's work so uniquely entertaining in a field that sometimes takes itself a bit too seriously. Combine that visual panache with one of the best design sensibilities in comics today and you have a book that's a sheer joy to view.

The only regret that Image fans are going to have after they read *Superpatriot II #1* is that they had to wait almost two years for a second series. Let's hope it's nowhere nearly that long a wait for a followup to this one!

Superpatriot II 1

Cliff: ★★

Brett: ★★

What do you get when you mix a gigantic monster and a three hundred foot tall superhero? No, not the Power Rangers. You get the all-new *Godzilla vs. Hero Zero* one shot that is coming out this June.

If you're reading this column, then I am willing to bet that you are already familiar with the large, green scaly half

of the two title characters. If that is true, then you are probably already familiar with the plot of the book, too. *Godzilla* gets mad, and comes to shore to stomp the bejeezus out of some poor city, and somebody has to try to stop him. In this case, the city is San Diego, and the sucker who gets to stop him is Dark Horse's manga-style member of the Dark Horse Heroes line, Hero Zero. Hero Zero is also the cause of all the problems in the city, as it was his irresponsible actions that brought the monster to shore.

Of course, a large part of the fun is the interaction between an almost archetypal monster and a popular superhero. It's almost like a crossover of two fictitious universes—and that's always been a popular concept in comics. And what more appropriate foe for a Japanese monster than a manga-inspired hero?

Zero is also a young boy named David MacCrea, who is the human half of this immensely powerful superhero. He just happens to be in San Diego to visit the country's largest and most famous comic book convention. There are little things cast throughout the book that make it great fun to read—like the comic convention, for example.

I remember many years ago, in the pioneering days of comic book fandom, when comics would occasionally make reference to fannish events in Rutland or to conventions in New York or Chicago, it would be as if we were in on a secret joke. There's a certain quality to that here; anyone who's ever attended a comic book convention is going to appreciate *Godzilla Versus Hero Zero* a little bit more.

The most surprising thing about this book is that things actually happen that will have ramifications on the character. Normally, these books are strictly throw-away fun, but not this time. Hero Zero's battle with *Godzilla* actually will have repercussions on David's life as Zero for the indefinite future. Since the book was written by Michael Eury, who has scripted Zero's exploits in the past, I expect the events of this book to be around for a long time.

The art on the book is by Tatsuya Ishida, who is best known for his work on *Zen: Intergalactic Ninja*. Ishida is able to bring a tremendous dynamics to the art of this book. He is especially shining when he gets to deal with the tremendous scale of the book. Ishida renders one of the most impressive versions of *Godzilla* that I have ever seen in comics form.

Godzilla vs. Hero Zero works on several levels. To begin, it works as a fun one-shot that comics fans can relate to easily. On another level, this book serves as the next step in the story of Hero Zero, a regular of the Dark Horse stable. In either case, it is a book worth the read.

Godzilla vs. Hero Zero

Cliff: ★

Brett: ★★

In the past decade, John Byrne has been called on many times to step in and revitalize a comic that was stagnant and moribund. With *Wonder Woman*, though,

he's been given a much more difficult charge. This time, he's signed on to strengthen and revamp a book that has, in the past year, climbed from near the bottom of DC's heap to the loftier rungs of fan-favorite status. It's the sort of challenge that few artists—and few companies—would be willing to accept.

Not only does Byrne accept it, he dives in with such gusto that there's no doubt that this is a Byrne book. Within the span of a single issue, *Wonder Woman* has a new home, a new supporting cast, and the most powerful nemesis in the DC Universe: Darkseid.

Wonder Woman #101 is, far all intents and purposes, *Wonder Woman Volume III #1*. John Byrne has stripped away so many of the trappings of the old heroine that his *Wonder Woman* is almost as dramatic a break from the old as was his *Superman* back in '86. The essential elements are still here, but even the character's appearance is slightly, subtly different: Byrne's *Wonder Woman* is larger, more intimidating, without being bulky or overmuscular. Inevitably there will be some comparisons to his *She-Hulk*, and in terms of size and strength, they seem to be appropriate. But *Wonder Woman* isn't *She-Hulk* in a red-white-and-blue suit; from the very outset, Byrne makes a point of casting her in the role of quintessential heroine. *She-Hulk* is a woman who is sometimes forced into superheroic actions; *Wonder Woman* is a superheroine who sometimes functions in a more mundane role.

Well, I was one of those people who had moved *Wonder Woman* from the bottom of my stack to one of my favorite

titles. It seemed odd, but I was actually disappointed to hear that Byrne was taking this book over. I would never have thought that I would hear myself say that about one of my favorite comic creators of all time, but it was true. So, I very gingerly opened and read his first issue, trying my best to keep an open mind. I found pretty much what you just described: this is now Byrne's book. What came before, good or bad, is really unimportant. Byrne is creating his own vision of *Wonder Woman*, and the previous incarnations are just what came before. I also agree that the one thing that most impressed me was the power of the Byrne *Wonder Woman*. Most of the time, she is cheesecake with superpowers, but here she seems to be a character of genuine strength. It will be interesting to see where Byrne goes from here.

I find Byrne's vision of an effortlessly powerful *Wonder Woman* to be his most significant alteration of the *Wonder Woman* canon. In Byrne's interpretation, she is a *Superman*-class powerhouse, and that's quite a change.

Byrne was wise to challenge *Wonder Woman* with a villain as powerful as *Darkseid*; right off the bat, he not only establishes the fact that Diana is a major player in the superhero game, but he also clarifies the fact that this is no longer essentially a mythological book—or rather that the mythology is now DC's mythology and not *Græco-Roman* mythology.

To be sure, there will be some fans who are going to miss the *Wonder Woman* of the past year, steeped in classical mythology and visually dominated by lithe, voluptuous women with impossibly long legs. But

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what they're going to discover is a new Wonder Woman who deserves her place at the top of DC's super-pantheon. When you finish the first issue, you're confident that John Byrne has Big Things in the works; I'm eager to see just what they are.

Wonder Woman 101

Cliff: ★★★★★

Brett: ★★★

The mystery of immortality has been with us for some time now. Mankind has been searching for a way to deny death for as long as written history has existed, and probably for centuries prior to that. Strangely enough, one of the cultures most associated with immortality are the people of ancient Egypt. And the fascination with those people has become almost as prevalent as the quest for immortality itself...

Egypt is a new seven-issue miniseries by Peter Milligan and Glyn Dillon that gives us a little insight into both mysteries.

Any significance to the number seven there? It was, after all, a divine number in many middle eastern cultures...

The story begins with a rather repulsive young man by the name of Vincent Me.

Gee, an egocentric character named Me...

Vincent is a man who uses others to support him. He has no redeeming characteristics, at least none that are presented in the first issue. The one thing that he is good at is finding people who will let him use them for his benefit. Unfortunately for Vincent, he has just about used up everyone he knows, so he has to meet some new people. The new people turn out to be a bit more than Vincent expected, though. He knew that they were a religious sect, but he had no clue what type of religion with which they were involved. The result is that Vincent finds himself on a tumultuous journey into a land that he knows only through stories, and onto the possible secret of immortality. The story kept me involved, due much to my fascination with Egyptian history and myth, and is sure to do the same for anyone who shares those fascinations. It is also a story that should appeal to anyone who has always questioned the viability of past lives, or even future ones.

What I enjoyed so much about the first issue was Milligan's presentation of everyday quasi-Egyptian life and culture. I have a Thornton-Wilderesque curiosity about the daily lives of the inhabitants of these oh-so-famous ancient cultures—their jobs, their daily routines, their family lives. Apparently, so does Milligan...

The art for *Egypt* by Glyn Dillon is clean and complex. He is able to create a variety of visual looks in this book, without varying his style significantly, just by changing his perspective and presentation. There isn't a lot of overly used

Wonder Woman 101



Egypt 1



Hunter's Heart 1

blacks, and there aren't overly exaggerated looks and styles to mask drawing difficulties. Dillon presents a very clear and concise, strongly illustrated story.

Egypt is, to paraphrase, an enigma wrapped in a mystery. The story is threatened to be upstaged by the setting, but the setting is motivated by the story, and you want to discover what lies beneath both.

Egypt 1

Cliff: ★★★★★

Brett: ★★

Hunter's Heart, Randy DuBurke's three-issue hard-boiled police drama for Paradox Mystery, is so steeped in attitude and so crusted in grit that you can easily imagine its main characters popping up in any episode of *NYPD Blue*. They might have a more rewarding career there, in fact; while *NYPD Blue* leaves viewers convinced that within the New York Police Department justice still exists as a concept deserving of honor, *Hunter's Heart* is set in a world so corrupt, so unwilling to look the other way that you begin to wonder if Detectives Pete Lindstrom and Jack Bearclaw will manage to survive for the entire three-issue run!

The premise is straightforward, razor-sharp, and bleak: a serial killer has terrorized the city with impunity, but now Lindstrom and Bearclaw have a lead that might enable them to capture the killer. Instead of support, though, they find obstacles and evasion. Furthermore, there are personality conflicts between these detectives and their fellow officers that inspire yet more job-related problems. You have no doubts from the outset that Lindstrom and Bearclaw are going after the killer; you're not sure, though, that they're both going to survive the hunt.

I also thought of *NYPD Blue* when I read this book. Burke has captured that same hard-boiled flavor in a comic. After reading *Hunter's Heart* for the first time, I went through and read it again, just to make sure I didn't miss anything.

Randy DuBurke has been all but absent from the comics field for quite some time. In the intervening time, his visual style has metamorphosed somewhat; DuBurke's strong Jim Steranko-Paul Gulacy influences are melded with a Bill Sienkiewicz-like visual brashness that gives the book a high-contrast, expressionistic look. It's a look that complements the story very well.

Hunter's Heart is attitude and mood wrapped up in a straightforward plot—which is the essence of noir drama. If you enjoy crime fiction, you're bound to appreciate DuBurke's efforts here.

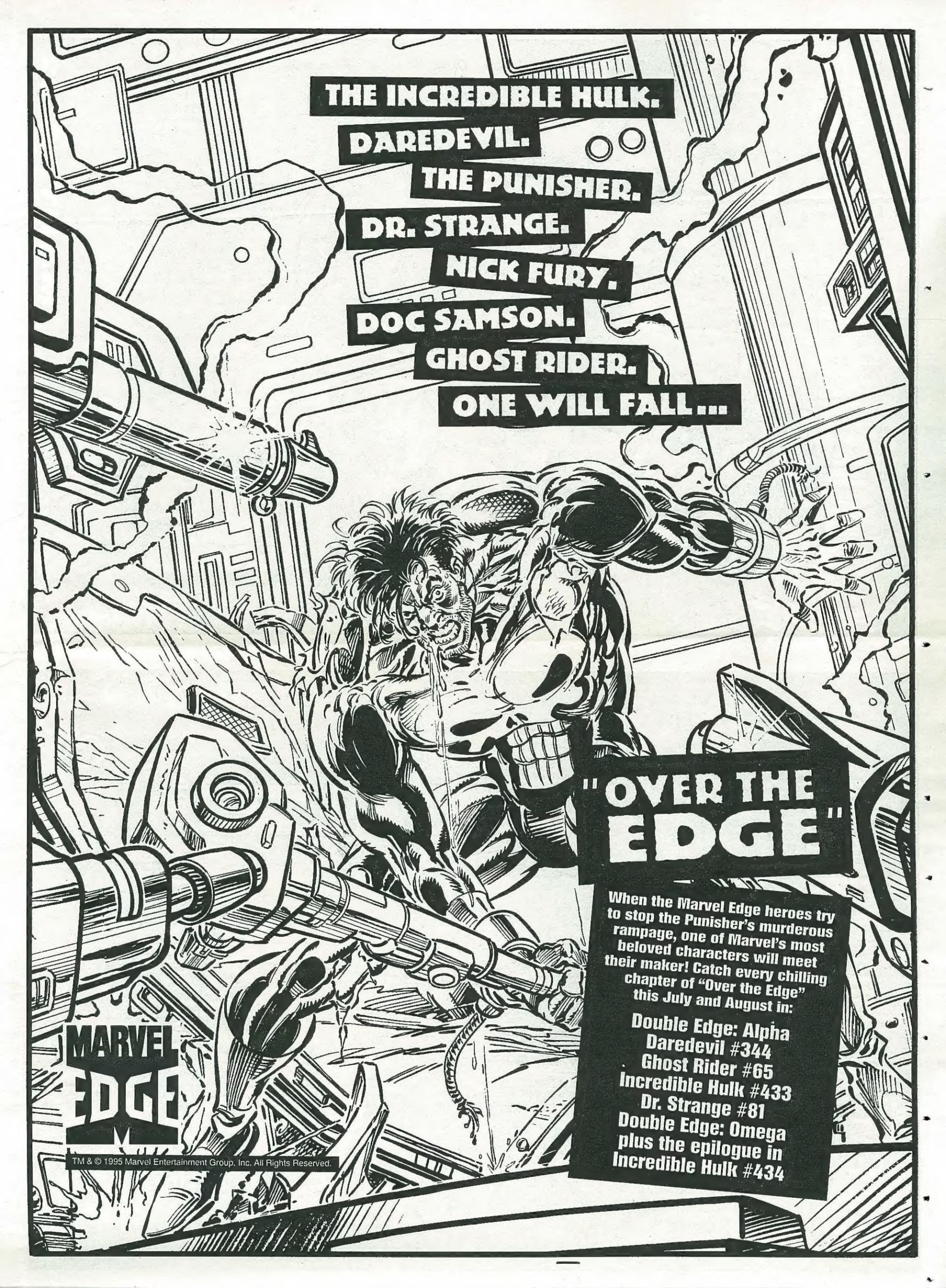
Hunter's Heart 1

Cliff: ★★

Brett: ★★

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